DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 590 SO 021 009

TITLE The Williamsburg Charter Survey on Religion and Public Life.
INSTITUTION Williamsburg Charter Foundation, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 3 Feb 88
NOTE 57p.; For a related document, see SO 021 010.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Constitutional Law; *Political Attitudes; *Public Opinion; *Religion; *Religion Studies; Religious Differences; *Religious Factors; Social Attitudes; Social Influences; Social Science Research; Social Studies; State Church Separation
IDENTIFIERS *Williamsburg Charter

ABSTRACT

Findings from a survey designed to gauge how U.S. citizens view the place of religion in public life are discussed. A total of 1,889 adults were interviewed at random by telephone for the cross-sectional sample. Additional interviews were conducted with more than 300 teenagers and with 7 leadership groups representing business, higher education, government, the media, and the clergy (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish). Results show that contrary to widespread belief and charges in recent public disputes, people are not becoming less tolerant. However, there is a notable ambivalence in the general public between theory and practice on church-state issues and citizens still draw a clear line on their toleration of atheism and alternative lifestyles in political leaders. Seven main areas of findings discussed are: (1) presidential candidates; (2) religious activism in public life; (3) church and state; (4) the limits of tolerance; (5) toward polarization; (6) the next generation; and (7) knowledge of the Constitution. An explanation of the survey methodology, an interpretive summary, an afterword, and five charts also are included. It is concluded that the survey offers grounds for both optimism and concern, and that four themese in particular are worthy of reflection: (1) Commitment and Civility; (2) Transition and Tensions; (3) Perceptions and Portrayals; and (4) Awareness and Affirmations. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED330590

THE WILLIAMSBURG CHARTER SURVEY ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

February 3, 1988

The Williamsburg Charter Foundation
Suite 375
1250 24th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
(202) 857-2360

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Thomas S.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SO 021 009

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Williamsburg Charter Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-sectarian organization concerned with the place of religion in American public life.

The survey was analyzed and interpreted by Professor James Davison Hunter of the Department of Sociology, University of Virginia.

The survey was conducted by the Center for Communication Dynamics under the direction of Professor William C. Adams of the Department of Public Administration, George Washington University. The Center is the research division of Rowan & Blewitt, Inc., of Washington, D.C. The Williamsburg Charter Foundation would like to express special thanks to Professor Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University for his helpful suggestions on the design and analysis of the survey.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof: or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press: or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The First Amendment, U.S. Constitution

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION v

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

MAJOR FINDINGS 8

1. Presidential Candidates 8

2. Religious Activism in Public Life 11

3. Church and State 14

- Reconciling Theory and Practice 14
- Public Expressions 15
- Conflicts Over Public Education 16

4. The Limits of Tolerance 18

- Unusual Sects 19
- Activities that Cause Concern 19

5. Toward Polarization? 21

- Evangelical vs. Secularist 21
- Leadership Groups and the General Public 25
- Media Fairness 26

6. The Next Generation 28

7. Knowledge of the Constitution 29

SURVEY METHODOLOGY 30

INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY 33

AFTERWORD 40

SURVEY TABLES 45

CHARTS

Chart 1: Acceptance of Religious Presidential Candidates

Chart 2: Tolerance of Religious Activism

Chart 3: Acceptance of Public Expressions of Religion

Chart 4: Tolerance of Many Religions, Fear of Some Cults

Chart 5: The Constitution and Freedom of Religion

INTRODUCTION

A House Dividing?

Religion and politics create volatile issues in many parts of the world and have been intensely debated in America. Recent charges and counter-charges about "godless humanists" and "religious zealots" have been heated. With an election campaign underway, the subject of religion in public life remains a potential iceberg issue of 1988 -- massive but submerged.

On the eve of the bicentennial of the Bill of Rights, it is plain that controversies about religion in public life are as lively and potent today as when the First Amendment was being debated nearly 200 years ago.

But how do the American people view the place of religion in public life today? Is there a vital knowledge of the Constitution? Where do Americans currently draw the line between church and state? Are there significant limits to tolerance? Are there important differences between the general public and key leadership groups? Is there less religious tolerance today than 20 or 30 years ago?

To answer such questions and help assess the state of the union regarding religion and public life, the Williamsburg Charter Foundation commissioned a nationwide opinion survey, conducted by the Center for Communication Dynamics of Washington, D.C.

The purpose of the study was to learn how people view these issues 200 years into the American experiment. The motive was not to find out

simply what the majority wants changed or restricted. After all, the Bill of Rights was written to guarantee the rights of minorities against the will of the majority.

With more than 60 questions asked and a wealth of data compiled, the study contains a myriad of stories -- on the activism of religious leaders, the limits of tolerance in American society, the place of religion in Presidential politics and on religion in the classroom.

The survey was conducted in December 1987, with a random, nationwide canvass of 3,017 Americans, including special samples of young people and leadership groups. A total of 1,889 adults were interviewed at random by telephone for the cross-sectional sample. Additional interviews were conducted with more than 300 teenagers and with seven leadership groups, including:

- business executives,
- college professors,
- government leaders,
- newspaper editors and radio/TV news directors,
- Protestant ministers,
- Roman Catholic priests,
- rabbis.

The survey methodology is described on page 30. The basic rule of thumb is that the sampling error (or confidence interval) for the national cross-sectional sample of adults is +/- 2.4%. For the supplemental youth sample the sampling error is +/- 5.6%. Because fewer people were interviewed in the various leadership groups, the sampling error varies from +/- 6.8% to +/-9.8%.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Four main themes emerge from this status report on where America stands on religion in the public arena after nearly 200 years of life under the First Amendment:

1. **Expanding Tolerance**: Contrary to widespread belief and charges in recent public disputes, Americans are not becoming less tolerant. In fact, there is a broad approval or acceptance of religion in public life, whether of its general place and importance or of its diverse expressions. As pluralism has expanded, toleration has expanded with it.

But there are noteworthy exceptions:

2. **Deep Ambivalences**: There is a notable ambivalence in the general public between theory and practice on church-state issues. Rhetorical assent to the separation of church and state is contradicted by nearly constant approval of less rigid separation in practice.

3. **Definite Limits**: While broad toleration is accorded to the main religious faiths, Americans still draw a clear line in their toleration of atheism and alternative life styles in political leaders and show a marked insistence on legal sanctions to curb unusual religious practices as well as more traditional groups when their activism is considered threatening.

4. **Significant Polarities**: Underlying the surface appearance of broad toleration, profound tensions and divergences are apparent. On a wide range of policy issues the rifts between the general public and certain leadership groups are pronounced, and even within the general public between different communities of faith.

These broad themes are supported by the following findings:

Presidential Candidates

The overwhelming majority of Americans are willing to vote for presidential candidates of different faiths which are part of the Judeo-Christian heritage.

- Only 8% of Americans would refuse to vote for a Catholic on the basis of religion.

- Only 10% would refuse to vote for a Jew.

- Only 13% would refuse to vote for a "born-again Baptist."

These numbers show increasing toleration: In 1958, 28% told a Gallup poll they would not vote for a Jew; 25% said they would not vote for a Catholic. The only movement toward intolerance was an increase from 1958 when 3% were hostile to a Baptist candidate to the current 13% who say they would not vote for a "born-again" Baptist.

- Only 13% would refuse to vote for a Greek Orthodox candidate.

- 70% say it is important that the President have strong religious beliefs.

- However, about one-fifth (21%) said they would be unwilling to vote for a candidate who has been a minister of a church.

- 62% say they would be unwilling to vote for an atheist for President.

- 65% say they would be unwilling to vote for a homosexual for President.

• Traditional moral values were expected in candidates for the President. 65% would be unwilling to vote for a homosexual (26% would be willing) and 43% would be unwilling to vote for a married candidate who "has been having other love affairs" (43% would be willing).

Religious Activism and Public Life

There is an expanding tolerance of diverse religious expressions and a general, though qualified, acceptance of religious activism in public life.

• About two-thirds (68%) agree that "religious groups should have a legal right to get involved in politics," but most people (57%) say that "personally," they would prefer "to see organized religious groups stay out of politics."

• 62% think it is proper for religious leaders "to try to close pornographic book stores."

• 56% do not fault the Right to Life movement for injecting religious issues into the abortion debate.

• But, religious activism to try to influence U.S. foreign policy toward South Africa produces a more divided response (44% pro; 42% con).

• Only 24% support church protection of immigrants whom the government says are illegal.

• A plurality, 40% to 34%, believes that the "Moral Majority should stay out of politics."

• 67% of those familiar with the American Civil Liberties Union believe that "the ACLU files too many law suits regarding religion."

Church and State

The public tends to favor a strict separation of church and state in theory, while accepting a strong blending of the two in practice.

• A majority of Americans (51%) prefer a "high wall of separation between church and state," while 32% favor "special steps" by government "to protect the Judeo-Christian heritage."

• However, when asked which of these statements came closest to their opinion: "The government should not provide support to any religion" or "The government should support all religions equally," 44% wanted no support for any religion; 52% wanted government support equally.

• Most Americans support the idea of having Congress open with a prayer (64%), public prayers before high school sporting events (59%) and a moment of silence in schools for voluntary prayer (77%).

• But most opposed the idea that "the government should require that Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools." (52% disagreed; 30% agreed).

• Most want Biblical perspectives about creation included with discussions of evolution (69%), with minorities favoring the teaching of creationism only (11%) or the teaching of evolution only (11%).

• 70% say that public schools should allow student religious groups to hold voluntary meetings in classrooms, when classes are not in session.

• Most Americans are unfamiliar with the term "secular humanism," but those who are aware of it (26%) are divided as to whether the schools are teaching it (11% of the total sample think they are; 8% think they aren't). Of those familiar with secular

humanism, roughly half think it is "bad" for the country, one-fourth think it is "good" and the rest have no opinion.

• The public is deeply divided on whether the government should provide financial help to parochial schools: 41% said yes; 50% said no.

• 80% agree that "it's OK for a city government to put up a manger scene on government property"; 79% agree that it's OK to put up candles for Jewish celebrations.

The Limits of Tolerance

While tolerance is expanding to the non-Western religions, certain limits remain.

• Only 13% felt that "there is no place in America for the Moslem religion," while 71% disagreed.

• 60% approved of having Buddhist chaplains in the armed forces.

• But two-thirds (65%) agree that "it should be against the law for unusual religious cults to try to convert teenagers."

• 57% said "there should be laws to prevent groups like Hare Krishna from asking people for money at airports."

• 54% endorse "laws against the practice of Satan worship."

• A majority (57%) believe that "the FBI should keep a close watch on new religious cults."

• 40% said they would support laws prohibiting preachers from using TV shows to raise money (49% said no).

• Nearly one-fourth (23%) said that "followers of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon should not be allowed to print a daily newspaper in Washington, D.C." (56% disagreed).

Toward Polarization?

Among the many tensions within the communities of faith, the widest divergence is between the secularists and the Evangelicals.[1]

• 61% of all secularists agree that "churches should have to pay taxes on all their property compared to 34% of all Evangelicals.

• Only 18% of secularists agree that "the government should require that Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools" compared with 52% of Evangelicals.

• 17% of secularists said that Evangelicals, more than any other group, "had too much power and influence"; while one out of 10 said that Evangelicals are "a threat to democracy."

• A plurality of all Americans, 45% to 41%, believe there is less religious tolerance today than there was 20 to 30 years ago.

• A plurality, 45% to 44%, believe that there are religious groups which are "a threat to democracy."

The Next Generation

Two age groups of young people -- 15-to-19 and 19-to-22 -- were surveyed. With only minor exceptions, there is no generation gap on religious issues.

---

[1]For the purpose of this study, a standard polling definition of Evangelical was used. An Evangelical is a Protestant who believes that "the Bible is literally true, word for word" and who has had a "born-again" experience. So defined Evangelicals comprise 18% of the national sample. This definition attempts to encompass theologically conservative Protestants, but does not distinguish significant theological and political differences.

Knowledge of the Constitution

As in the past, attitudes to the Constitution are marked by a high level of esteem but a low level of knowledge.

- For example, only one in three (33%) knew that the freedom of religion is guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Leadership Contrasts

On a broad number of policy issues there are profound divergences between the general public and certain leadership groups and between those leadership groups.

- One out of every five academics said that Evangelicals, more than any other religious group, had "too much power and influence."

- Nearly one out of three academics (34%) said that Evangelicals are "a threat to democracy." This sentiment was shared by 27% of the rabbinate.

- While just over half of the general public (52%) believes that the government should support all religions equally, the majority of leaders in business (76%), government (78%), universities (87%), the media (64%), the Protestant ministry (62%) and the rabbinate (78%) believe that "the government should not provide any support to any religions."

- While roughly half (52%) of the public disagrees that "the government should require that Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools," strong majorities in business (66%), government (84%), the university (89%), the media (79%), and the rabbinate (68%) disagreed with that statement.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1

Presidential Candidates

One clear indication of expanding tolerance can be measured by the public's willingness to vote for Presidential candidates who personally identify with one or another religious tradition, a strong negative vote being especially significant. The overwhelming majority said that they would be willing to vote for candidates whose faith was within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

- Only 8% said they would be unwilling to vote for a Catholic.
- Only 10% said they would be unwilling to vote for a Jew.
- Only 13% said they would be unwilling to vote for a Greek Orthodox.
- Only 13% said they would be unwilling to vote for a born-again Baptist.

However,

- About one-fifth (21%) of the American population said that they would be unwilling to vote for a minister.
- And 62% said they would be unwilling to vote for an atheist.

[See Chart 1]

By themselves, these results may appear uninteresting. They become more significant when one sees that only three decades ago, public opinion was not nearly so accepting.

A similar series of questions was posed by the Gallup poll 30 years ago and the contrast in the answers is significant.

- In 1958, 28% of the American population said they would not vote for a Presidential candidate who was Jewish, compared to only 10% today.

- Likewise, one of every four Americans (25%) in 1958 was opposed to a nominee who was Catholic, compared to only 8% today.

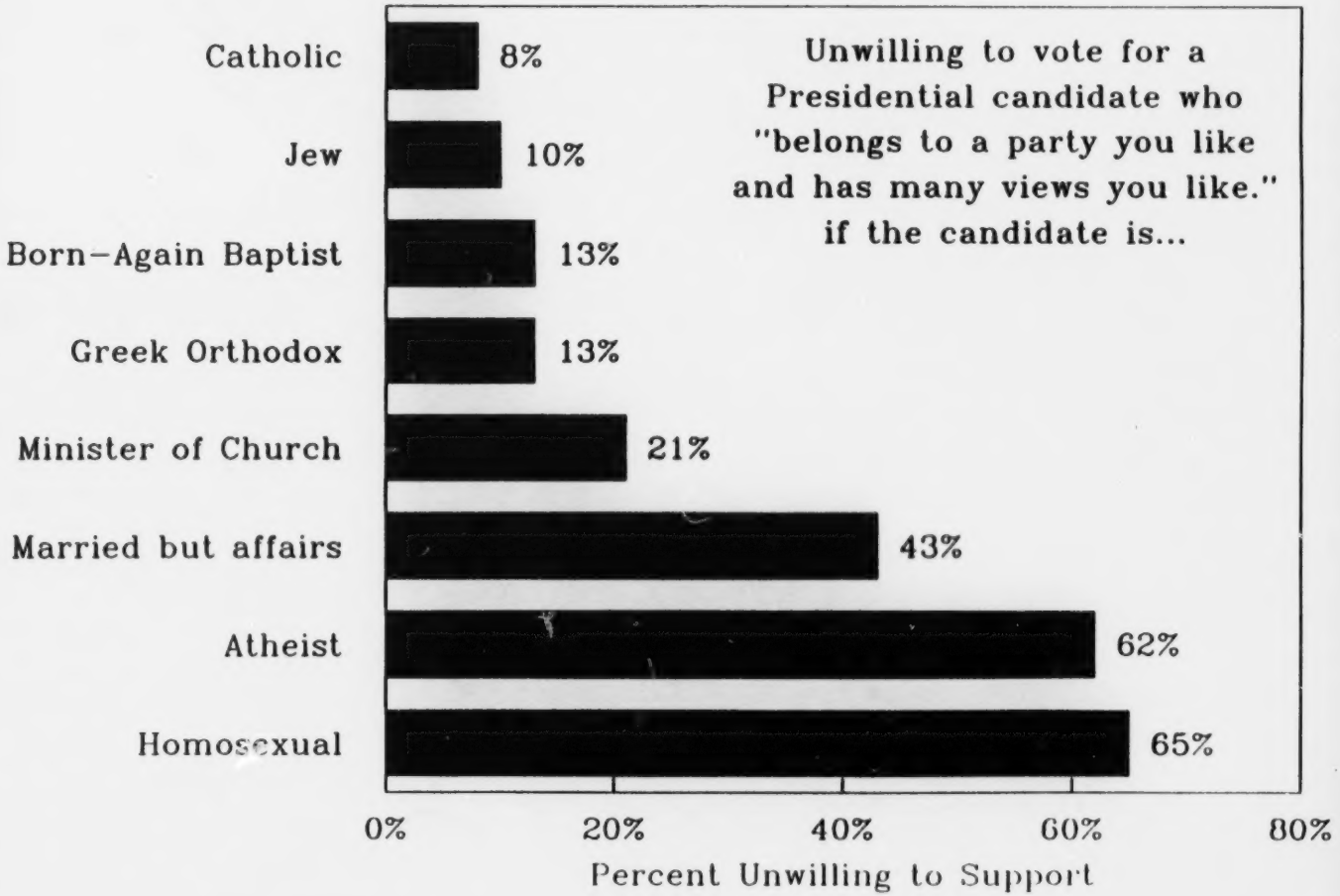
- Even in the case of the candidate who is an atheist, although the majority of the public still say they would not be willing to vote for that person, their number has decreased -- from 75% in 1958 to 62% today.

This growing acceptance of a variety of faiths is especially significant in light of the importance Americans attach to having a President who holds firm religious convictions. It is not that they want candidates for public office to talk about their religious values (34% think that those who do so are "hypocrites," and 22% are not sure). But the majority do want to be assured that politicians operate out of a value system that is religious in character.

- Seven out of 10 (70%) in the general public say it is important to them that "the next President be someone who has strong religious beliefs" -- 33% say it is "very important" and 37% say it is "somewhat important." Only 29% say it is "not important."

Strictly speaking, religious pluralism is not moral pluralism. Therefore, toleration of diverse beliefs does not necessarily imply toleration

Chart 1:
Presidential Candidate Characteristics



of diverse life styles. As the survey shows, there was more opposition to candidates who engage in alternative life styles.

- Just over two of every five (43%) Americans said they were unwilling to vote for a married candidate who "has been having other love affairs," although 43% said they were willing.

- Roughly two-thirds (65%) are not willing to vote for a homosexual, although one-fourth (26%) said they were willing.

2

Religious Activism in Public Life

Numerous religious leaders -- from Black clergy through Catholic bishops and activist Mainline Protestant clergy to Fundamentalist pastors -- have been active in a wide range of social and political issues. That fact raises questions about the public's acceptance of such activism. The survey shows that not only is there an expanding toleration of diverse religious expressions, but there is a general, though qualified, acceptance of religious activism in public life. For example,

- More than two-thirds (68%) agreed that "religious groups should have a legal right to get involved in politics."

- The majority of the public (59%) and leadership groups (ranging between 58% and 89%) disagreed that "the influence of religion on American politics threatens to divide us as a country."

- Nearly half of the national sample (47%) believe that "democracy in the United States works better if Americans are religious." (Of these, roughly 16% believe that "religion is absolutely required for democracy to work well.") Yet roughly the same number (45%) believe it makes no difference.

However,

- More than half of the public (57%) agreed that they "personally" would "like to see organized religious groups stay out of politics."

This would extend to specific groups:

- More Americans agreed (40%) than disagreed (34%) that "the Moral Majority should stay out of politics."

- Of those who were familiar with the American Civil Liberties Union, two-thirds (67%) agreed that "the ACLU files too many law suits regarding religion." (Among elites in the media, academia, government and rabbinate, however, majority opinion swung in the opposite direction -- disagreeing with that statement.)

Within some leadership groups the contrast between personal preferences and the recognition of legal rights is especially strong. Among academics, for example, 72% agree that they would personally like to see organized religious groups stay out of politics, but an even greater number (75%) agree that religious groups should have the legal right to get involved in politics.

This general concession can be seen in the responses of those surveyed to several concrete situations.

- Just under two-thirds of the general public (64%) and nearly three-fourths of the leadership groups (averaging roughly 73%) agree that "it is proper for religious leaders to publicly support political candidates who are running for office."

- About six in 10 (62%) of the public and a similar percentage among most leadership sectors agree that "it is proper for religious leaders to try to close pornographic book stores."

- Over half (56%) agreed that it was "OK for the Right to Life movement to use religion in the debate on abortion." Upwards of eight in 10 of the leadership groups agreed to this as well.

• 61% of the national sample agreed that it is "OK for Jewish groups to give money to politicians who support Israel." Between 75% and 91% of all leadership groups also agreed with this statement.

• Slightly more Americans agreed (44%) than disagreed (42%) that it is proper for religious leaders to try to influence U.S. policy toward South Africa. (14% were not sure.) Most leadership groups were twice as likely as the general population to support this proposition.

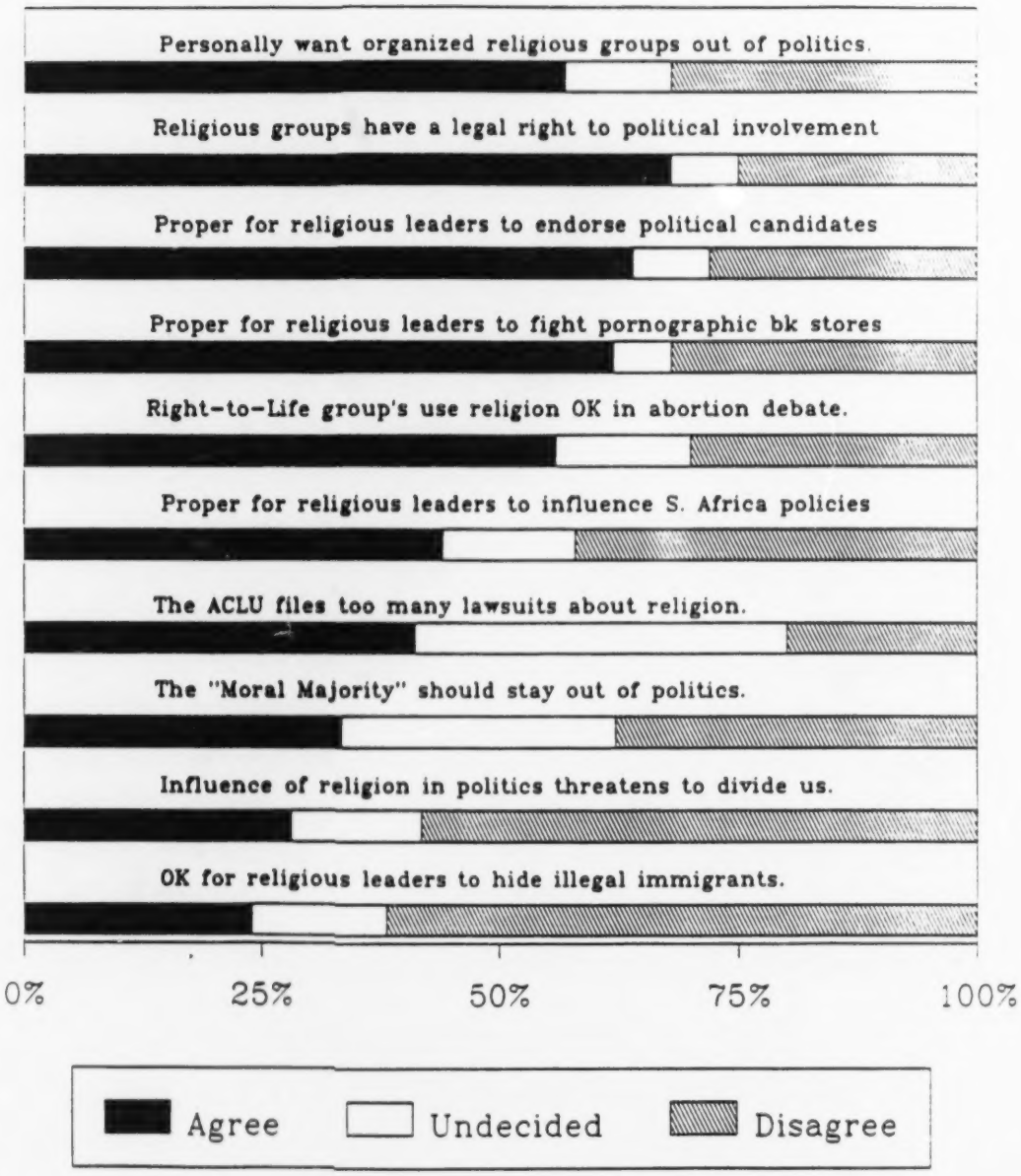
However,

• Six in 10 Americans (62%) did not agree that it was "OK for religious leaders to hide immigrants from Latin America when the U.S. government says those immigrants are illegal." (24% agreed)

[See Chart 2]

For most Americans, then, it is perfectly acceptable for religion to play an active and visible role in public life. One significant caveat is that this activism not violate the law.

Chart 2: Tolerance of Religious Activism in American Politics


Personally want organized religious groups out of politics.
Religious groups have a legal right to political involvement
Proper for religious leaders to endorse political candidates
Proper for religious leaders to fight pornographic bk stores
Right-to-Life group's use religion OK in abortion debate.
Proper for religious leaders to influence S. Africa policies
The ACLU files too many lawsuits about religion.
The "Moral Majority" should stay out of politics.
Influence of religion in politics threatens to divide us.
OK for religious leaders to hide illegal immigrants.
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%
Agree
Undecided
Disagree

3

Church and State

The American public is generally ambivalent about the relationship between church and state, tending to favor a strict separation in theory, while accepting a strong blending of the two in practice. The Williamsburg Charter Survey shows these cross-currents clearly.

Reconciling Theory and Practice

- The greatest number (51%) maintain that "there should be a high wall of separation between church and state," compared to 32% who held that "the government should take special steps to protect the Judeo-Christian heritage" and 18% who did not know.

- On the other hand, a slight majority (52%) believes that "the government should support all religions equally" compared with 44% who say "the government should not provide any support to any religions."

- The majority also expresses strong confidence in the Supreme Court. Two-thirds of the general population (65%) and an even more uniform majority of the leadership groups (79%) - business, 73% - government, 87% - academic, 75% - media, 88% - rabbis, 68% - priests, and 61% of the Protestant ministers agree that "the Supreme Court is the best place to decide controversies about the separation of church and state."

• And a surprisingly large number in the general public (48%) agree that "Churches should have to pay taxes on all their property" compared to 41% who disagree. (12% - don't know)

The inconsistency is provocative. When cross-tabulating responses to these questions, 28% of the public took a consistently strict separationist position favoring both a "high wall of separation" and "no government help to religion." At the other end, 20% maintained a consistent position accepting some government support (e.g. favoring both the "government protecting the Judeo-Christian heritage" and "supporting all religions equally"). The majority (51%), however, gave mixed answers to the two questions. Further analysis, then, plainly shows the uncertainty of the public over this important constitutional issue.

Public Expressions

For all the rhetoric of church/state separation, the overwhelming majority accepts cooperation between the two.

• 64% of the general population agree that "it's good for Congress to start session with a public prayer." (25% - disagree; 12% - don't know)

• So, too, 59% agree that "it's good for sporting events at a public high school to begin with a public prayer." (30% - disagree; 11% - don't know)

• Likewise, eight out of 10 Americans (80%) agree that "it's OK for a city government to put up a manger scene on government property at Christmas." (13% - disagree; 7% - don't know)

• Eight out of 10 (79%) also agree that "it's OK for a city government to put up candles on government property for a Jewish religious celebration." (15% - disagree; 7% - don't know)

• In the surveys of leadership groups, 81% of the rabbis surveyed opposed putting "candles on government property for a Jewish religious celebration," but 80% of the Protestant ministers and 89% of the Catholic priests favored the idea.

• Finally, 88% of the general population believe it is "OK for the government to pay for chaplains for the military." (7% replied "no"; 5% - don't know).

[See Chart 3]

Conflicts Over Public Education

One of the fiercest battlegrounds of church-state conflict is about the public schools. Yet the Williamsburg Charter Survey again shows the uncertainty over this issue, although the public generally tilts toward compromise. For example,

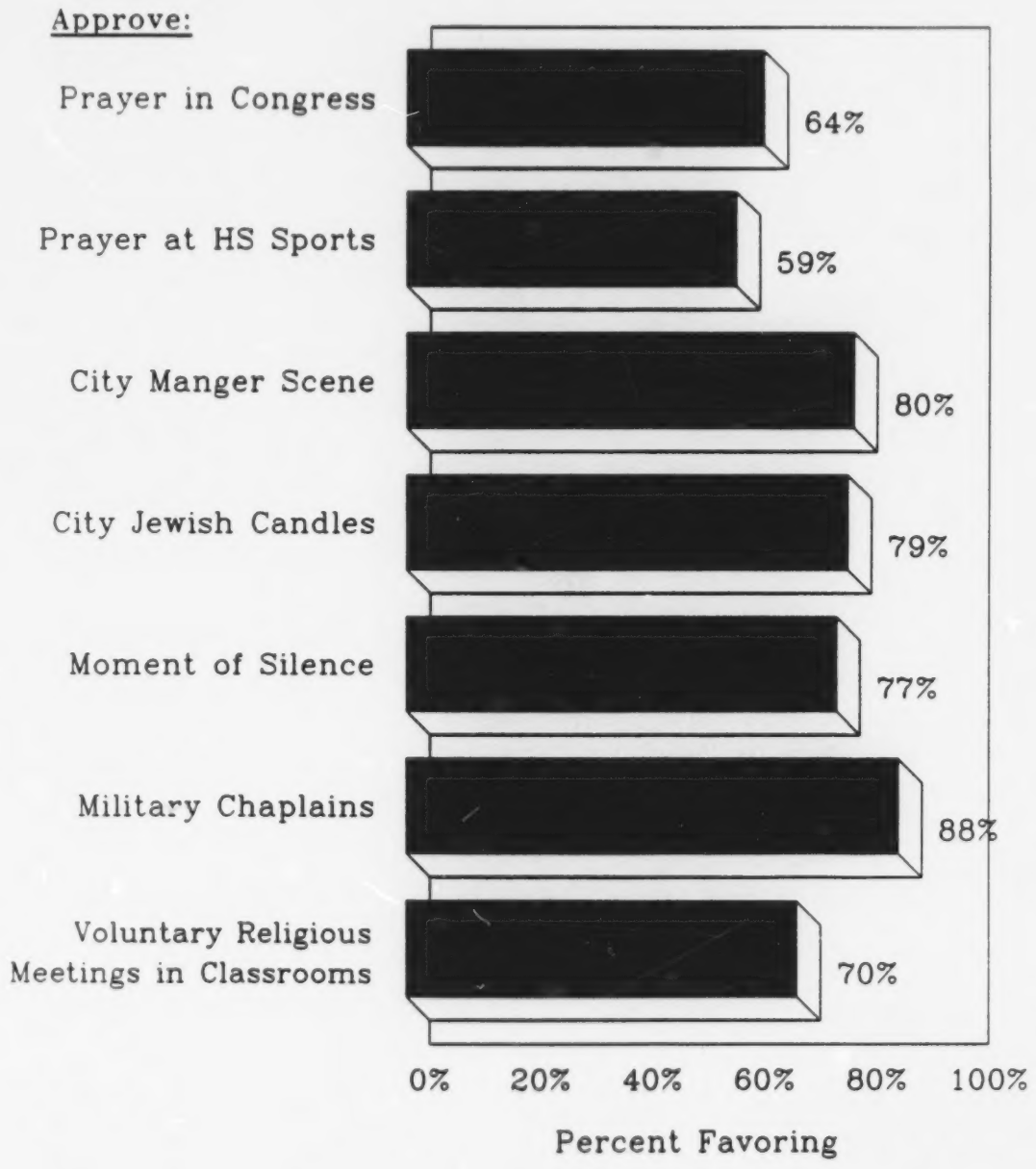
• Seven out of 10 (70%) agree that "public schools should allow student religious groups to hold voluntary meetings in school classrooms, when classes are not in session." (24% -disagree; 6% - don't know)

• Over three-fourths of the public (77%) agree that "public schools should set aside a moment of silence each day for students to pray if they want to." (19% - disagree; 4% - don't know)

• 69% hold that public schools should teach both "evolution and the Bible's account of the creation of life on earth." 11% say they should teach only evolution; 11% say they should teach only creationism.

• Yet almost one-third (30%) agree that "the government should require that Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools." (52% - disagree; 18% - don't know)

Chart 3: Acceptance of Government Support of Religious Expression



• On the other hand, precisely half of the national sample (50%) said the government should not provide financial help to church schools, while 41% said it should. With the exception of Catholic priests, the leadership groups are generally against the idea.

Another related issue debated in the courts concerns the dilemma of defining "religion" and the status of "secular humanism" in the public schools. Only 1 in 4 (26%) in the national sample were familiar with the term "secular humanism." But of those familiar with the term:

• A slight majority (52%) believed that secular humanism should have the same rights and restrictions as a religion (15% didn't know).

• And there were twice as many (46%) who said that secular humanism had a bad impact on the country than those who said it had a good impact (23%).

In the leadership groups, however, the majority did know the term and felt qualified to comment on it.

• 69% of the priests and ministers think that "public schools are teaching the values of 'secular humanism'" compared to government (31%), media (30%), academics (37%) and rabbis (30%).

• While the majority of Protestant and Catholic leaders familiar with the term (63% each) said that secular humanism had a "bad impact on the country," a plurality of leaders in academics (61%), the rabbinate (40%) and the media (36%), thought it had a "good impact on the country."

4

The Limits of Tolerance

Broad toleration extends generally to the major faiths in the Judeo-Christian heritage. The survey also provides evidence that toleration is expanding to include non-Western faiths -- Islam and Buddhism in particular.

- About seven out of every 10 Americans (71%) disagreed with the statement, "There is no place in America for the Moslem religion." (13% agreed and 16% don't know)

- An even greater percentage (roughly nine in 10) of the leadership sample disagreed with this statement. (93% -- business elites, 92% -- government leaders, 100% -- academics, 98% -- leaders in the media, 79% -- ministers, 94% -- priests, and 93% -- rabbis.)

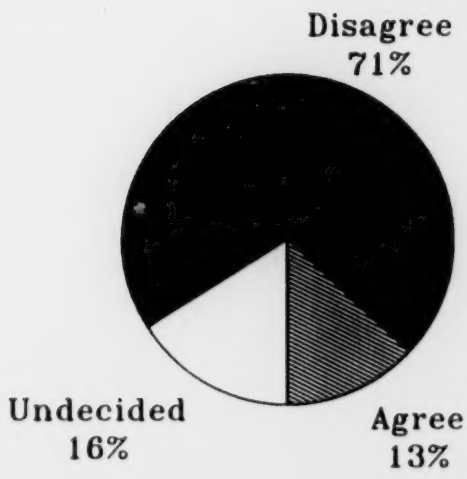
- Well over half of all Americans (60%) approve of the government paying for Buddhist chaplains in the armed services. This compares with 88% approval of government support of existing chaplains.

- Similarly, an even greater percentage of the leadership sample (between seven and nine of every 10) approved of Buddhist chaplains.

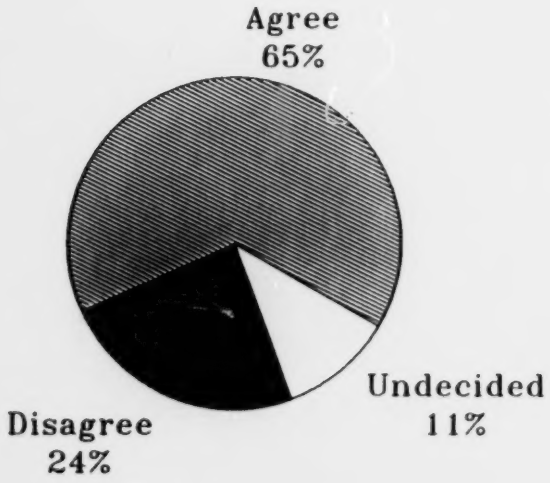
The last figure is particularly relevant when it is realized that the dominant faith of the fiftieth state, Hawaii, is Buddhism.

But there are limits to tolerance. We have already seen limits in the public's unwillingness to accept political leaders known to practice

Chart 4: Tolerance of Many Diverse Religions But, Fear of Cults



Americans reject the statement "There is no place in America for the Moslem religion."



But -- a majority agrees that "It should be against the law for unusual religious cults to try to convert teen-agers."

alternative life styles (such as homosexuality and infidelity). The public's toleration is also seriously limited in its willingness to accept atheism.

Unusual Sects

This survey reveals other limits to tolerance, particularly surrounding the activities of the more exotic religious sects.

- About two-thirds (65%) agree that "it should be against the law for unusual religious cults to try to convert teenagers."

- More than half (57%) endorse the idea that "the FBI should keep a close watch on new religious cults."

- The same number (57%) said that "there should be laws to prevent groups like the Hare Krishna from asking people for money at airports."

- Just over half of all Americans (54%) believe that there should be "laws against the practice of Satan worship."

- Finally, though more than half of the population (56%) disagreed, nearly 1 out of every 4 (23%) agree that the "followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon should not be allowed to print a daily newspaper in Washington, D.C."

[See Chart 4]

Activities that Cause Concern

Unusual sects are not the only ones to encounter definite limits to public tolerance. Certain other activities from a wider range of groups also cause concern.

• A plurality of Americans (49%) disagree, but as many as 40% agree that "it should be against the law for preachers to use television shows to raise money."

• A majority of Americans (59%) disagreed, but of the 31% of Americans who think religious groups have "too much power and influence," the majority believe that "some of their public activities should be restricted."

Though not linked explicitly to limits on tolerance, a cluster of views emerged that could support such limits:

• A plurality of Americans (45% to 41%) agreed that "there's less religious tolerance than there was 20 or 30 years ago."

• A majority (56% to 34%) believe that "people who hold strong religious beliefs tend to be intolerant of people who hold different beliefs" (with secularists agreeing even more strongly -- 68%).

• Nearly 1 in 3 Americans (31%, with an even higher number of secularists -- 39%) believe some religious groups have "too much power and influence."

• A bare plurality of Americans (45% to 44%, with 11% don't knows) believe that some religious groups are "a threat to democracy."

5

Toward Polarization?

Within the general population there are not only tensions, but a certain impulse toward polarization.

Evangelical vs. Secularist

The polarizing forces are strongest between the Evangelicals and that part of the population claiming no particular religious faith, the secularists, or the so-called "religious nones." Secularists are one of the fasting growing groups in American society (increasing from around 2% in the 1962 to about 10% today) and as the political claims of the Evangelicals have become more vocal in the last decade, so too, the social antagonism between the two has grown.

> For the purpose of this study, a standard polling definition of Evangelical was used. An Evangelical is a Protestant who believes that "the Bible is literally true, word for word" and who has had a "born-again" experience. So defined, Evangelicals comprise 18% of the national sample. This definition attempts to encompass theologically conservative Protestants, but fails to distinguish significant theological and political differences.

On church/state issues:

- 34% of all Evangelicals agreed that "churches should have to pay taxes on all their property" compared to 61% of all secularists (national average, 48%).

• 89% of all Evangelicals agreed that "public schools should set aside a moment of silence each day for students to pray if they want to" compared to 59% of all secularists (national average, 77%).

• 52% of all Evangelicals agreed that "the government should require that Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools" compared to 18% of all secularists (national average, 30%).

On religion in public life:

• 69% of all Evangelicals agreed that "it's OK for the Right to Life movement to use religion in the debate on abortion" compared to 43% of all secularists (national average, 56%).

• 77% of all Evangelicals believe that "it is proper for religious leaders to try to close pornographic bookstores" compared to 45% of all secularists (national average, 62%).

On the moral and religious orientation of presidential candidates:

• Only 15% of all secularists say that it is "very important" to them "that the next President be someone who has strong religious beliefs" compared to 67% of all Evangelicals (national average, 33%).

• 64% of all Evangelicals claimed that they would not be willing to vote for a person who is married but has been having other love affairs compared to 28% of all secularists (national average, 43%).

• 86% of all Evangelicals claimed that they would not be willing to vote for a homosexual compared to 49% of all secularists (national average, 65%).

In all of these areas, Evangelicals and secularists represent two ends of a barbell -- each about as far from the national average as the other. Not

only do these communities tend toward different opinions on different issues, but they also show a tendency toward mutual hostility:

• On the one hand, 88% of all Evangelicals claimed that they would not be willing to vote for an atheist compared to 34% of all secularists. (national average, 62%)

• Yet on the other hand, in 1958, only 3% of the general population said that they were unwilling to vote for a Presidential candidate who was a Baptist. When the Williamsburg Charter Survey asked a similar question about a candidate who is a "born-again" Baptist, 13% said they would not. The percentage who say this is even higher among secularists. Nearly one out of every five secularists (17%) said they would not be willing to vote for a "born-again" Baptist.

• Nearly one out of every five secularists (17%) said that Evangelicals[2], more than any other religious group, had "too much power and influence."

• So, too, nearly 1 out of every 10 secularists (9%) said that Evangelicals are "a threat to democracy." This compares to 6% of the Catholics and 6% of the Mainline Protestants who held this position.[3]

The number of those who describe Evangelicals or secularists as "too powerful" or a "threat to democracy" (from any camp) may seem small, but the question was designed to measure the prominence of particular threats. These respondents were not prompted in their selection in any way. For these people, such groups are a clearly identifiable menace.

Other sectors of the population share a distrust of Evangelicals, most notably, the Jewish leadership and academics.

---

[2] This umbrella category includes answers such as "fundamentalists," "evangelicals," "evangelists," "born-again Christians," "Baptists," "TV preachers," "the religious right," and "conservative Christians." It obviously does not discriminate between theological and political distinctions within the conservative Protestant community.

[3] Mainline Protestants comprised 43% of the national sample and Catholics 25%.

• Nearly 1 out of every 5 academics (19%) said that Evangelicals (more than any other religious group) had "too much power and influence."

• Nearly 1 out of every 3 academics (34%) said that Evangelicals are "a threat to democracy." This sentiment was shared by 27% of the rabbinate.

Importantly, while these leadership groups show deep apprehension about conservative Protestantism, and personally wish religious leaders would stay out of the public realm (74% of the business leaders, 72% of the academics, 66% of the government, 57% of the media elites, and 56% of the rabbis agreed with the statement "I would personally like to see organized religious groups stay out of politics"), the majority remains consistently "libertarian" in seeing the legal right of religious groups in general and Evangelicals in particular, to engage in political activity.

• 75% of the academics, 71% of the media, 72% of the rabbis, 68% of the government leaders agree that "religious groups should have a legal right to get involved in politics."

• 87% of the rabbis, 84% of the academics, 76% of the government, 74% of the media elite agreed that "it's OK for the Right to Life movement to use religion in the debate on abortion."

• 87% of the academics, 72% of the media, government leaders and business leaders, and 74% of the rabbis agree that "it is proper for religious leaders to publicly support political candidates who are running for office."

• Likewise, the majority in positions of leadership in government (86%), academics (87%), the media (81%), business (77%), rabbinate (77%) and priesthood (73%) disagrees with the statement that "it

should be against the law for preachers to use television shows to raise money."

The climate of tolerance may or may not have changed. But the majority of Evangelicals seem to think it has. Over half of all Evangelicals (55%) agree that "there's less religious tolerance today than there was 20 or 30 years ago" compared to 45% of the Mainline Protestants, 46% of the Roman Catholics, and 35% of those without a religious preference.

Leadership Groups and the General Public

As with other surveys that compare elite opinion to that of the general public, the Williamsburg Charter Survey also shows significant overall differences in attitudes in a number of areas. This gap is particularly wide on church/state issues. Yet some leadership groups diverge from public opinion more than others.

In this survey Protestant ministers and Catholic priests resembled the general public more closely than the others, while the academic elites, the rabbinate and in many cases the media and government elite were the furthest removed from public opinion. The later leadership groups are especially interesting.

Academics are the most consistent in their defense of religious expression, even for groups considered to be outside the mainstream.

- Where nearly 6 out of 10 (57%) of the American public agrees that "there should be laws to prevent groups like Hare Krishna from asking people for money at airports," 74% of the academic leaders and 66% of the media disagreed with that statement.

- Likewise, a slight majority (54%) in the national sample agrees that "there should be laws against the practice of Satan worship" yet the majority of leaders in the universities (81%), the media (70%), government (69%) and the rabbinate (60%) disagreed.

• And finally, 57% of the public agrees that "the FBI should keep a close watch on new religious cults" compared to 89% of the academics, 71% of the media and government elite and 60% of the rabbis who disagreed.

Leadership groups also provide the most consistent advocates of a "high wall of separation."

• While just over half of the general public (52%) believes that the government should support all religions equally, the majority of leaders in universities (87%), government and the rabbinate (78%) believe that "the government should not provide any support to any religions."

• While roughly half (52%) of the public disagrees that "the government should require that Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools," strong majorities in the university (89%), government (84%), the media (79%), and the rabbinate (68%) disagreed with that statement.

Finally, as we have seen, they are the most concerned of all groups about the political impact of conservative religious groups.

The rifts in opinion between leadership groups and the general public are reflected in (and partly explained by) differences in educational achievement. Region, age, gender all proved to be relatively unimportant, but on numerous issues the "education gap" is noticeable. The greater the educational achievement, the greater the tendency to adopt separationist positions on church-state matters and to show greater tolerance of religious and moral diversity yet a greater mistrust of conservative religion.

<u>Media Fairness</u>

What may contribute to the sense of polarization is the perception on the part of a substantial minority of the public (44%) that the media (TV and newspapers) "are often unfair to religious groups." The majority of ministers (61%) and priests (60%) concur. One of every four media elites (24%) themselves believe that television and newspapers are unfair to religious groups.

All groups are likely to think of their own religion as the most mistreated, at least as indicated by the leaders of the major faiths.

- Protestant ministers are more likely than any other elites to say that Evangelicals are treated unfairly.

- Catholic priests are more likely than any other elites to say that Catholics are treated unfairly.

- And the rabbis are more likely than any other elites to say that Jews are treated unfairly.

Of religious groups in the general population, Evangelicals are the most sensitive to this within the general public (62% of whom say the media are "often unfair to religious groups"). This compares to 41% of the Mainline Protestants, 40% of the Catholics and 35% of the secularists.

One illustration of their own concern about this issue is the fact that 84% of all Evangelicals agree that they are bothered "when TV and movies use the words 'Jesus Christ' to express anger or surprise" compared to 59% of Mainline Protestants, 51% of Catholics and compared to only 33% of all secularists, 39% of all rabbis, 41% of the media elite, and 18% of all academics.

6

The Next Generation

The national survey included two samples of American young people covering the 15-to-18 and the 19-to-22 age brackets.

With only a few exceptions, the answers of the young people to survey questions closely tracked the national sample and reveal no discernible "generation gap" on issues concerning religion and public life. The most statistically significant differences included:

- Only 47% of the 15-to-18 group and 46% of those 19-to-22 think "it's good for Congress to start sessions with prayer," compared to 64% of the national sample.

- Although 41% of the national sample favored government financial aid to church schools, 65% of those 15-to-18 and 58% of those 19-to-22 thought such help appropriate.

- Only 47% of those 15-to-18 and 46% of those 19-to-22 are bothered by the use of "Jesus Christ" to express anger or surprise on TV and movies, compared to 57% of the national sample.

7

Knowledge of the Constitution

What past opinion surveys have shown with regard to the Constitution and First Amendment remains true today: a high level of veneration, but a relatively low level of knowledge.

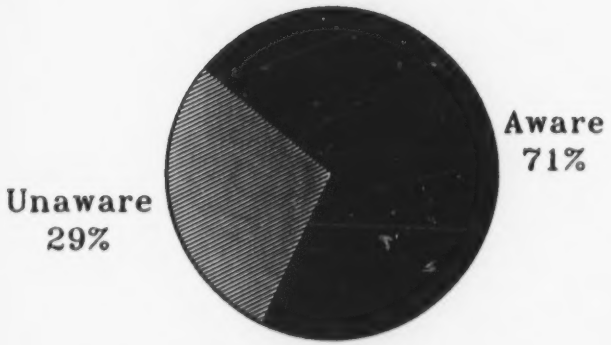
- In response to the question, "What pops into your mind when you hear the words 'the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution," ten times the number of respondents thought of the freedom of speech or of the press than of freedom of religion.

- Roughly 7 in 10 (71%) remembered that freedom of religion was in the Constitution.

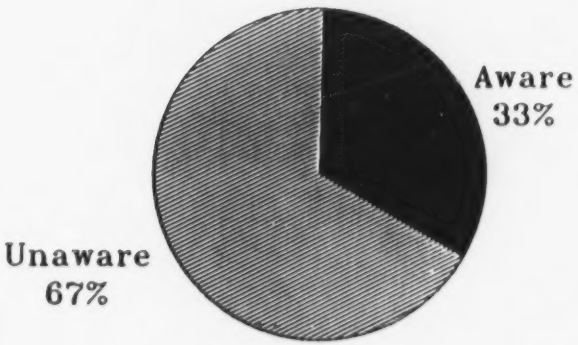
- But only 1 in 3 (33%) knew that the freedom of religion is guaranteed by the First Amendment.

[See Chart 5]

Chart 5: Public Awareness: Constitution and the Freedom of Religion



Most Aware Freedom of Religion
Is in the U.S. Constitution



Most Unaware Freedom of Religion
Is in the First Amendment

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

December 1-15, 1987, the Center for Communication Dynamics conducted nationwide telephone surveys of a total of 3,017 Americans, including special samples of young people and of key leadership groups. A total of 1,889 adults were interviewed as a part of the national cross-sectional sample of Americans 18 years of age and older. Random-digit dialing was used in order to reach telephone households not listed in directories.

Leadership group samples were drawn at random from the following:

- Business (n=202): listed in Who's Who in Industry and Finance.

- Academics (n=155): university faculty members of Ph.D.- granting departments of political science, sociology, history, and English.

- Government leaders (n=106): sample of top 3,000 career and political appointees in Federal government departments and agencies.

- Media (n=100): nationwide "gatekeeper" sample of radio and TV news directors who are members of the Radio and Television News Directors Association; and newspaper editors in cities of over 100,000 population, as listed in Working Press of the Nation (1987).

- Ministers (n=101), Priests (n=100), and Rabbis (n=99) from a nationwide sample of diocese offices, churches and synagogues.

A supplemental national survey of high school-age young people conducted an additional 265 interviews with teenagers 15 to 17 years of age. Data from this portion of the survey are presented separately from the basic national sample of the voting-age population. The latter sample incorporates an oversample of 362 young people ages 18 to 22 (weighted in proportion to their size in the adult population when included in the national cross-sectional sample).

The size of the completed sample is large enough to yield a good estimate of the population surveyed. **The basic rule of thumb is +/-2.4 percent as the confidence intervals for results based on the national cross-sectional sample of adults (age 18+).** Confidence intervals show the range within which the findings from repeated samplings during the same time period could be expected to vary, 95% of the time.

Confidence intervals for the separate oversample of young people are +/- 5.6 percent for the 15-18 age group and for the 19-22 age group. Among leadership groups, 863 people were surveyed. Samples of "elite" groups are usually not as large as samples of the general population; and, samples of particular leadership groups range from 99 to 202 in the Williamsburg Charter Survey study. Most are about 100 each. Confidence intervals for the sample of business leaders are +/- 6.9 percent; for academics, +/- 7.8 percent; and for most other leadership groups, +/- 9.6 percent.

The Evangelical/Fundamentalist grouping as applied to religious affiliation in the tables in the report consisted of all those who said the Bible was literally true and also said they personally had had a "born-again" religious experience.

Survey Confidence Intervals

Group Surveyed:	Sample Size:	Confidence Intervals:
National Cross-Section (age 18 and up) (1,889 unweighted)	1,708 weighted	+/- 2.4 %
Youth Sample: 15-18	310	+/- 5.6 %
Youth Sample: 19-22	301	+/- 5.6 %
Leadership Groups:		
Business	202	+/- 6.9 %
Academics	155	+/- 7.9 %
Government	106	+/- 9.5 %
Media	100	+/- 9.8 %
Ministers	101	+/- 9.8 %
Priests	100	+/- 9.8 %
Rabbis	99	+/- 9.8 %

INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY

The focus of this survey is a subject of abiding interest and importance -- the place of religion in public life. The reality it portrays is enormously complex. To understand more fully even this preliminary review of the survey findings, it is appropriate to set the issues in a slightly wider context.

Pluralism: Past and Present

At the heart of the church-state relationship in America is the reality of pluralism. How do expressions of religious conviction remain free of state interference while its adherents press specific and often conflicting interests? The tensions this dynamic creates are as visible and as politically consequential today as they were at the drafting of the Bill of Rights 200 years ago. Indeed, the tensions may be even greater today because of the changing face of pluralism.

The story is as complex as it is interesting. It involves many actors and many subplots but the overall pattern of change is clear.

In the early years of American colonial life, New England was the center of intellectual and cultural activity where a vibrant Puritanism prevailed. The Evangelical and Calvinistic pietism of the Puritans spilled out of New England into the lower colonies with the First Great Awakening in the 1740s.

At the founding of the Republic, American culture still retained a distinct Puritan quality, but it was giving way to a more heterogeneous,

though still thoroughly Protestant, ethos. By the early years of the nineteenth century, largely because of the success of the Second Great Awakening, this had become an accomplished reality: sectarianism flourished, but sectarianism of a distinctly Protestant nature. Pluralism expanded, but not in such a way as to upset Protestant domination. At the time of the first census in 1790, Catholics comprised only 1% of the population; Jews, even less than that.

The pluralistic balance that had been achieved early in the 19th century was to be challenged through the rest of the century. With the mass immigration of Catholics in the 1830s, mainly from Ireland and later in the century from Italy and Eastern Europe, Catholicism became a permanent and influential fixture in American life. With the mass immigrations of Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe in the final decades of the 19th century, Judaism also became a permanent and influential feature of American life.

Pluralism continued to expand, yet not without tensions. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries the balance of pluralism continued to tilt toward Protestantism. The Protestant domination in politics, public policy and social ethos presented enormous difficulties for Catholics and Jews. By the middle of this century, however, much of the overt and latent tension had dissipated to the point that the sociologist, Will Herberg, could describe American culture as a unique and more or less balanced composition of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish influences.

In the latter half of the 20th century, a new stage emerged in the expansion of pluralism, with the growth and visibility of new and exotic religions from Asia and elsewhere. For example, during the 1960s alone, roughly 185 new religious groups were founded with at least 3,000 local centers of activity. But even more important than this is the dramatic growth of a portion of the population who claim no religious preference at all -- the "secularists." In 1952 secularists comprised only 2% of the population. Their number remained constant through the early 1960s (2% in 1962), but then their numbers began to grow. By 1972 "religious nones,"

as surveys classify them, comprised 5% of the population. By 1982 they reached 8% and by 1988, they made up about 10% of the total population. (In this survey, "religious nones" comprise 11% of the total sample.) This remarkable growth represents a major new development in the expansion of pluralism in American life and thus a new challenge to the earlier pluralistic balance.

It is in this context that we can understand the Williamsburg Charter Survey's effort to probe the current place of religion in public life.

Religion in American Public Life

An expanding pluralism has meant greater challenges for the American people. Nevertheless, the most basic finding of the Williamsburg Charter Survey is a confirmation of what many people intuitively know from their daily experience. Namely, that, contrary to widespread belief (and to the charges and counter-charges in recent public disputes), Americans are not becoming less tolerant. In fact, there is a broad tolerant approval or acceptance of religion in public life, whether of its general place and importance or of its diverse expressions. As pluralism has expanded, tolerance has expanded with it. This is particularly true within the Judeo-Christian family of faiths.

The religious and moral preferences of a presidential candidate provide just one measure of the tolerance of religious diversity. But it is an important one. The President is not only important for the power he or she possesses, but for what he or she represents. The President is very much a symbol of the American people and what they stand for, both publicly and privately. This measure, then, shows clearly that tolerance has expanded to include the gamut of Judeo-Christian faiths -- from Jews to born-again Baptists. There are also indications that it is expanding to include Buddhism and Islam.

Religious expression in public life also has a more active component. A cursory review of American history shows that from the founding of the

Republic through the tragic years of the Civil War to the birth pangs of industrialization, world wars, and Civil Rights, religion has played a very visible and, in some cases, decisive role in the political life of the country. In our own day and for issues of our own time (such as disarmament, abortion, women's rights, pornography, hunger, and the like), religion continues to play an active and important role.

The questions the public have long debated are simply, "is this activity legitimate?" and, more broadly, "what is the 'proper' place of religion?" Should Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders and the institutions they represent seek to change opinion and generate change in the social and political realm, or is their proper focus exclusively the spiritual well-being of private individuals? The general consensus historically has been in favor of a public and, therefore, political role for religion.

This general approval continues to the present. The Williamsburg Charter Survey shows that while tolerance of religious activism in American life is far from uniform in the population, it is still the majority opinion.

There are, however, three important qualifications to this generally sanguine picture of religion in American public life.

The first is that the place and role of religion in public life has created notable ambivalence in the general public. The average American gives rhetorical assent to the strict separation of church and state, yet frequently approves of policies which involve considerable cooperation between church and state.

This ambivalence on the part of the general public is hardly surprising. After all, the proper relationship between church and state, not to mention the two Religion Clauses, is one that perplexes legal scholars, judges and activists as well. After many decades of debate, opinion about the relationship between church and state in a country that

prohibits an established, national church tends to coalesce around two opposing positions: strict separationism and accommodationism.

The question is not whether most Americans agree with the principle of the separation of church and state, but what does "separation" mean? -- no government support whatsoever (strict separationism), or support to all with no preference given to one over another (accommodationism)?

As noted in the findings, the ambivalence of the American public tends to be between theory and practice (though, in fact, there is some ambivalence at both levels). In theory the public tends toward strict separationism, while in practice toward accommodationism.

Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the conflict over public education. In this context the particular and inviolable rights of parents to see that their children are taught within the value system of their own choosing (usually religious in nature) are pitted against the needs of the state for a universal system of education, instruction and training; the reality of a deep and abiding pluralism against the requirements of a common culture.

Public schools, reflecting what could be fairly called a state monopoly over education, are confronted with the problem of balancing a sensitivity to religious and cultural plurality with the goal of universal education for the young. For many Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, Lutherans, atheists and others, public education -- an agency of the state -- has not yet achieved a satisfactory balance. It is perhaps because of this that public opinion generally tilts toward an accommodationist position -- favoring voluntary prayer, equal access, the teaching of both the evolutionist and creationist views of the world's origins, prayer at school sporting events, and the like.

As the survey shows, there are other areas besides public education in which we see this dynamic at play; despite the fact that Constitutional decisions since the 1940s have tended to favor the position of strict

separationism, the public has not necessarily followed along. The public remains ambivalent.

A second exception is that there are very clear limits to tolerance.

It is true that tolerance has expanded with pluralism, but they are not simultaneous processes. It is probably more accurate to say that tolerance follows behind an expanding pluralism. In our own time, as the survey makes clear, there are very real limits to the public's willingness to tolerate alternative moral practices, the activities of the more exotic sects and the agenda of more traditional groups when their activism seems threatening.

What stands out in each of these areas, however, is the unwillingness to tolerate certain kinds of activity. It seems that what offends is not belief, but behavior. It is this about which the public is wary.

The third exception expands on the last. Underlying the surface appearance of broad tolerance, not only are there limits, but there are profound tensions and polarities. As we have seen, the greatest polarization is between Evangelicals and secularists. It is true that neither the Evangelicals nor the secularists are ideologically monolithic, but the percentages show considerable, and in some cases, enormous gaps. These gaps are significantly larger than those that divide Protestants (Mainline or Evangelical) and Catholics.

It is worth pointing out that the cultural chasm between Evangelicals and secularists is just part of a chasm that separates the religiously orthodox from the religiously progressive and agnostic. As other research is just now beginning to show, Evangelical Christians, Orthodox Jews and conservative Catholics are increasingly discovering their commonalities as religious communities just as many liberal Protestants, liberal Catholics, Reform Jews and secularists are together discovering theirs. Beyond that, both sides have already built political coalitions against the other. The

religious and anti-religious activism in public life is merely symptomatic of the widening fault-line.

This development raises an important point. It is true that tolerance has generally expanded as pluralism has expanded. But this is not an axiom of social life holding for all times and all places. This trend cannot be projected into the future with any confidence.

AFTERWORD

by The Williamsburg Charter Foundation

Reflections on the Eve of a National Election

This study represents a snapshot of American public opinion on the eve of a national presidential campaign and as we approach the bicentennial of the Bill of Rights. It therefore provides an opportunity for reflecting on the importance of the First Amendment in public life, the state of current developments and strains surrounding it, and the challenge to political candidates. Interpreted in the wider national and international context, the survey offers grounds for both optimism and concern. Four themes are salient and worthy of reflection.

1. Commitments and Civility: After 200 years, the Constitutional guarantees of freedom of conscience and provisions for ordered liberty show tremendous resilience and practical relevance for American public life. Although other parts of the Constitution have been criticized by groups such as Blacks and women, rarely has such criticism been applied to the First Amendment Religion Clauses.

The survey provides evidence of this resilience and relevance in terms of an easily taken-for-granted aspect of the tolerance noted throughout the findings. **In many countries , particularly in the Third World, there is a clear link between strong religious commitments and weak political civility. In many other countries, particularly in the developed world, there is an equally clear link between weak religious commitments and strong political civility. But a pronounced and enduring**

feature of American society, due largely to the First Amendment, is its combination of relatively strong religious commitments and relatively strong political civility.

Behind this optimistic conclusion lies the brighter side of pluralism, a social reality that has been at the heart of the unfolding American story. As America has changed from Puritan to general Protestant to Judeo-Christian and beyond, pluralism has expanded steadily, with tolerance folowing behind it.

2. Transition and Tensions: The process of adjusting and readjusting to the constraints and standards of the First Amendment Religion Clauses is an ongoing requirement of American democracy that will never be finished. A definitive, once-and-for-all solution is impossible, so the arrival and significance of new developments and tensions require attention. One such strain grows from another face of pluralism, for the story of the last generation is not simply one of straightforward expansion of pluralism, but of its changing composition. For the first time in American history, significant numbers of people have gone beyond Judeo-Christian in one direction (toward Eastern religions) and even beyond religion in another (toward secularism).

Ever since the 1960s, strong currents of expanding pluralism have been converging and colliding with equally strong currents of increasing secularity. In the powerful undertow of the conflicting pulls -- sometimes leading toward a profusion of religion in public, sometimes toward a prohibition -- previously accepted understandings of religion and politics have been passing through a time of turbulence and redefinition, and new ones (of whatever quality) are made more likely. This cultural turbulence is the context of recent conflicts over religion and public life. Several such tensions are evident in this study and in a comparison of its findings with recent features of the public debate.

- There is a cultural chasm between America's "first faith" (Evangelicalism) and America's "fourth faith" (secularism).

Although only half the number of Evangelicals (roughly 10% of the nation compared with roughly 20%), secularists reflect higher levels of education and stronger national influence because of their predominance in leadership groups.

• The above cultural clash is not unique, but simply the sharpest version of a growing rift between certain modernizing forces in America (religiously progressive and agnostic) and certain counter-modernizing forces (the religiously orthodox, whether Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Jewish). Both sides have supporting political coalitions, and their religious and anti-religious activism in public life is indicative of a significant fault-line in American society.

• The combined effect of the above two clashes is to produce a prominent feature of the current political scene: the politics of values, not issues.

• There is also a significant divergence between the church-state views of the general public and those of America's opinion-makers, with the public view leaning toward "accommodationism" in practice despite "separationism" in theory, and the majority of the intellectual leaders of the nation leaning toward "strict separationism" in both theory and practice. Although the Supreme Court followed the "strict separationism" of the intellectual leaders in the early sixties, its views would seem to have stepped back from the logic of a rigid separationism, while never swinging back to the accommodationism of the general public.

3. Perceptions and Portrayals: In times of transition such as the present, the role of activists and opinion leaders becomes especially important in the national debate, but not without strains and costs.

• There is a fascinating disparity between the broadly tolerant view of the general public and its own perception that American society is less tolerant than 20 or 30 years ago. Several factors might explain

this disparity, such as worldwide impressions of a link between fundamentalism and fanaticism.

• There is a further important gap between the attitudes of the general public and the perceptions and portrayals of certain activists who have claimed to speak on its behalf. By helping to create this gap and by exaggerating the logic of recent trends and the fears of their own constituencies, certain activists have had the effect of charging the disputes over religion and politics with even greater social and political tensions.

• There also would appear to be an interesting difference between attitudes about religious beliefs expressed in public, which are almost universally tolerated, and attitudes about behavior in public which is usually the principal focus of concern about religious activism. Unless religious activists and political candidates with a high religious profile clearly articulate a public philosophy as they move into the public arena, their activism is likely to be viewed automatically as intrusive and even as a serious threat to democracy and the rights of others.

4. Awareness and Affirmations: Taken together, the gap between the admirable civility of the American public and the very real tensions also present is significant.

In such a setting the continuing lack of knowledge of the Constitution is noteworthy, but neither new nor worrisome in itself. Attitudes about the Constitution demonstrated in these findings have long been characterized as a sort of "reverent ignorance," and this study reinforces that description.

But the ignorance taken together with the transitions and tensions raises important questions for America's public policy thinking and those who formulate it. In particular, the challenge facing national leaders in the next decade is to avoid simply capitalizing on the divisions created by religious diversity, and instead to address their political concerns in a

manner that does justice to those with different religious commitments. The friction created by many smaller questions (such as religious symbols in public places) could be largely resolved by an increase in civility, but this civility depends in turn on answers to larger questions, and to two above all:

- One fundamental question concerns public education and the complex connections between religion and the transmission of moral values in a pluralistic society.

- The other fundamental question concerns America's public philosophy and, within it, the legitimate place of religion in public life and the guiding principles by which people of different faiths are free to enter public life and engage with each other robustly but civilly.

In the end, both the issue and the mood of the nation call for statesmanship from leaders who address the issue and responsibility from citizens who assess them. The approaching bicentennial of the First Amendment is therefore an occasion for genuine celebration, but not without substance. At the very least, the gaps and tensions now present in the nation indicate the need for celebration to be accompanied by a reaffirmation of first principles and a renewal of the shared understandings surrounding the First Amendment in our time.